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## Cultural values, moral sentiments and the fashioning of gendered migrant identities

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### ABSTRACT

The promotion of British cultural values to which all citizens can and should sign up to has taken on unprecedented urgency and momentum in political and public discourses. This paper explores the meanings and values attached to contemporary forms of Britishness from the perspective of migrant refugee women, and outlines the conflicting interpretations and expectations of different projects of feminine citizenship. Drawing on empirical research it suggests that gendered migrant identities and values are formed and performed in relation to real and imagined understanding of British (white) heterosexual women and can be seen, at least in part, as asserting moral value and distinctiveness. The women invoked migrant cultural pride in the form of caring, community, close family ties and heterosexuality to claim recognition and resist the lack of moral value ascribed to migrant identities. However, this is achieved through a re-inscription of gender identities in which heterosexuality and sexual restraint become technologies of regulation and control.

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### Introduction

The promotion of British values and a national shared identity to which all citizens can and should sign up to has taken on unprecedented urgency and momentum in political and public discourses. ‘Common values’ are seen as foundational to stable and cohesive communities (Home Office 2002), and more recently, ‘British values’ have been positioned as a key part of the UK Government’s Prevent strategy which was devised to address extremism. This strategy describes extremism as ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’ (Home Office 2015, 2). Implicit in these discourses are the linked assumptions that communities and nation states have settled collective and stable values and identities; that values and ideas about what matters in life can be defined and have a single shared meaning; and that shared values and national identity are threatened by the arrival of transnational migrants, particularly those from origin countries which are most culturally distant from an assumed Christian Europe. In this socio-political context migration has become fundamentally tied up with

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questions of identity and cultural values, and migrants, particularly Muslim migrants, have become the receptacles for society's projected moral and social anxieties. Majority cultural values are positioned as the glue which can hold society together in the face of the corrosive impact of migrant values (Bhattacharyya 2009). An exploration of values and identities from the perspective of migrant women exposes the contested, gendered and ethnocentric structures of valorisation at work in these discourses.

This turn to cultural values and identity is reflected in the growth of compulsory integration measures across Europe aimed at ensuring migrants adopt the cultural values and language of the host country (Morrice 2014; Perchinig 2012). Issues of identity and values are increasingly used as a mechanism to control who can belong to the nation state, for example, by linking naturalisation to the passing of language and citizenship tests. Such tests can be seen as an overt expression of the state's project of moral regulation which aims to give a single, coherent and unifying expression of timeless national identity and morality. In debates over British values an assumed set of dominant and clearly defined concepts is presented as being neutral, universal and non-contestable. These are the values of, for example, tolerance, individual liberty, fairness, democracy and the rule of law, which are depicted as having evolved through time and are thus modern and progressive. They are set out in the Government handbook for the *Life in the UK: A Guide for New Residents* (Home Office 2013) in which the UK is described as 'a modern and thriving society with a long and industrious history' with values and principles based on 'history and traditions' (2013, 7). The construction of this 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) in which British cultural identity is fixed depends upon a polarising discourse in which migrants are 'othered'. In the drawing of the moral landscape 'Western' interpretations of these values are accorded moral superiority (Bhattacharyya 2009); and the values of migrants are left largely unexplored, or at best perceived as 'pre-modern' and belonging to some long past stage of civilisation. At worst, issues such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and 'Muslim terrorism' become exemplary tropes drawn upon to legitimise shared values discourses and to '... present an appearance of disciplining unruly cultural minorities to a wider electorate' (Bhattacharyya 2009, 16).

Efforts by the nation state to fix cultural values and modes of citizenship become normalising discourses, or what Bourdieu refers to as 'authorising discourses' accepted by most as 'legitimate speech' (Bourdieu 1991, 109). These discourses mask what is, in reality, a multiplicity of different experiences, values and ways of understanding the world around us. The taken for granted legitimacy forecloses space for dissent and restricts participation in democratic debate for those whose cultural identity and values are perceived as problematic, or who do not have the same understanding of these values. With no prior authorisation the language of the culturally different migrant cannot participate in 'democratic iterations' and the production of new forms of legitimacy (1990, 109). It is in the context of dominant cultural discourses and their moral logics, and also the plurality of overlapping and interlocking arenas of material practices, power and knowledge that notions of gender are reworked, defended, transmitted or disrupted. These domains, which include family, community and faith, ensure that gender is negotiable and constantly evolving.

This paper reports on a participatory research project in the UK with migrant women all of whom have a refugee background. Drawing on the concept of cultural citizenship (Ong 1996, 2003) it explores what this group of migrant women considers important,

what are worthwhile ways of living and what is valued. It suggests that women's narratives about cultural values and identity are not only highly reflexive of the cultures they have grown up in, but also what they perceive to be British cultural values and where the points of tension and dissent lie. The social and emotional labour of caring for others, cultural maintenance, modesty and virtue are claimed as distinctly migrant values, yet, in the claiming of moral value the control of women and their sexuality becomes central. The research illustrates the importance of the moral dimension of social life for understanding processes of identity making. Drawing on the work of Sayer (2005, 2011) and Skeggs (1997, 2005) I will suggest that responses to immoral sentiments and misrecognition, and the search for respectability and respect offer a prism through which to analyse and observe the (re)making and re-inscription of gendered migrant identities. The paper begins by addressing the conceptualisation of cultural citizenship, migrant identities and values.

### Cultural citizenship, identities and values

Identities and identifications are conceptualised as relational, context dependent, fluid and always in a process of becoming rather than fixed or established (Hall 1992; Rattansi 1994). Hall suggests that:

[c]ultural identity ... is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being' ... It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (1990, 225)

The formation of cultural identities and values is a relational process – formed, reformed and transformed with reference to the cultures and cultural discourses around them. It is an understanding which recognises that particular identities only acquire relevance or meaning in particular social spaces and in relation to difference; that complex power relations operate constructing some identities as 'normal' while others are deemed deviant, 'other' or even threatening. Identities are seen as being formed in and through discursive formations, such as the dominant discourses of idealised notions of British citizenship and values, discourses of femininity and feminine citizenship, but also through different subaltern cultural discourses and faith based discourses. The identities and identifications of migrant women are understood as highly differentiated, occupying a multitude of subject positions, as Brah has argued '... their everyday lives are constituted in and through intersecting discourses, material practices and matrices of power embedded in these' (Brah 1996, 159–160). There is a materiality to migrant identity – bodies, memories, practices, values and tradition – which represent the most visible disruption to the construction of national identity and therefore make the migrant appear particularly problematic. It is this materiality which provides the connective tissue with the past and which shapes engagement in society. It provides a lens through which subjective experiences are sifted and gender identities (re)formed and rewired.

Ong's (1996, 2003) concept of cultural citizen is useful as it reflects not only how overarching state discourses and apparatus are taken up and translated by various institutions and actors, but also how discourses operate across a range of domains and socio-cultural spaces. She describes cultural citizenship as 'a dual process of self-making and being made

within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society' (1996, 738). Drawing on Foucauldian notions she argues that individuals are subject to a range of disciplinary forces such that the work of instilling proper normative behaviour and identity is not only taken up by the state, but also institutions of civil society and social groups. Citizenship is conceptualised as 'the cumulative effects of technologies of government ... in everyday interactions of negotiation and struggle over key cultural values ...' (2003, 75). Importantly, this involves a focus on dominant and subaltern cultural discourses which produce specific effects that define and categorise desirable and undesirable sorts of citizen. Real, or alleged, cultural differences are drawn upon to order human groupings into status hierarchies which becomes the basis of discrimination so that exclusion is also '... the everyday product of people's maintenance of their "comfort level" of permissible liberal norms against the socially deviant newcomers who disturb that sense of comfort' (1996, 740). For Ong, migrants are engaged in constant struggles over boundary making and representations.

Like identities, our cultural values are not static and do not emerge in silos; the increasing porosity of national borders and the globalisation of communication systems ensures a constant flow and juxtaposition of cultural values. As Bhattacharyya (2009) and others have pointed out, the so called 'Muslim terrorist' can be seen as a product of Western culture and values, often raised and immersed in that framework of values and cultural references, and passing as an ordinary and unremarkable citizen. Croft (2007) writing of the construction of 'modern jihadi terrorists' argues that 'they are part of British society, and take their cues from us: in their attitudes and behaviour, they are much more British than we British would like to believe' (Croft 2007 cited in Bhattacharyya 2009, 11). Values then cannot be viewed as being produced by the cultural and social world in which we live in any straight forward or linear way; they are mobile and under constant refinement and renegotiation. Here Sayer's work (2005, 2011) provides insights into the complexity and significance of the moral dimension and evaluative nature of everyday life. Sayer argues for greater attention to lay normativity in everyday social practice: social life is inextricably concerned with evaluative judgements about what is good and bad, and struggles over definitions of what is good and what matters to people are an inevitable part of life. Individuals are sentient beings with an evaluative orientation to the world, including the past, future, and our relations to and with others. These 'first person evaluations' and their emotional force are irreducible to 'an effect of norms, discourse or socialisation, or to an "affect"', and to do so is to misunderstand social life (Sayer 2011, 2). In this view values can be understood as

'sedimented' valuations that have become attitudes or dispositions, which we come to regard as justified. They merge into emotional dispositions and inform the evaluations we make of particular things, as part of our conceptual and affective apparatus. (2011, 25–26)

Values are not simply *a priori*, but are also the product of experiences and interactions so that acquisition of values becomes a recursive process based on repeated experiences and valuations of actions; our values become 'habits of thinking to which we become committed or emotionally attached. They inform not only how we evaluate others but how we evaluate ourselves, and they influence how we act ...' (Sayer 2011, 26–27). The acquisition of values, our evaluations and judgements can occur subconsciously (Bourdieu 1977) or through conscious reflection and 'internal conversations' (Archer 2003). Hence they are also open to

challenge and reassessment in the light of new situations or experiences. The significance of our evaluative relationship to the world cannot be overlooked as our sense of well-being, self-worth and respect (or suffering and shame) are dependent on how others interpret and treat us, particularly in terms of relations of equality and difference. Practices which exhibit cultural differences and distinctions, and the desire to be recognised as having moral worth or value, are a crucial feature of social stratification such that:

... struggles for recognition are a fundamental dimension of social life and that what is at stake in them is the accumulation of a particular form of capital, honour in the sense of reputation and prestige ... (Bourdieu 1990, 22)

Recognition from others and respectability is claimed on the basis of being acknowledged as having valued practices and moral virtues (Skeggs 1997, 2004; Sayers 2005). Everyday social life then involves struggles for social recognition, and the normalising of certain identities and values give rise to persistent value hierarchies which deny status recognition and esteem to other groups (McNay 2008).

Women have long been recognised as central transmitters of culture and the symbolic bearers of group identity and values (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1989; Yuval Davis 1997; Castles and Davidson 2000), consequently, they are often placed at the forefront of struggles to maintain and reproduce culture. Situated at the intersection of local and familial cultural values with those of dominant cultural values they are subject to the classifications and judgements operating at a spectrum of levels and domains, from state to those of the family, the community and faith groups. Their pivotal role at the interface between the state and the local is underlined, for example, by the interventions and 'active citizenship' training for Muslim women under the UK *Prevent* strategy (2011). They are positioned as mediators and managers of the tensions and conflicts between different value systems, and must enact their citizenship and find acceptable and valued ways of being across and within the different spheres.

## Research and methodology

The research project 'Cultural Values from the Subaltern Perspective: A Phenomenology of Refugees' Experience of British Cultural Values'<sup>1</sup> adopted a multi-method qualitative approach working with a group of women with refugee backgrounds on a range of participatory activities. One of the broader aims of the project was to explore British cultural values from the perspective of refugees and migrants, a group new to British cultural life who are often marginalised from 'mainstream' cultural activities, and simultaneously expected to adopt British cultural values. Refugee backgrounds were only significant in so far as we were interested in working with marginalised women whose cultural background was distant from culturally dominant UK society, and who were most likely to perceive their long term future in the UK. The project centred on a 16 week programme of arts and cultural activities, such as visiting museums, parks, historical buildings, sports and musical events, and interspersed with reflective activities, focus groups and interviews, the programme explored experiences and attitudes towards typically British cultural practices. The research took place in a city in the south of England with low levels of ethnic diversity (according to the 2011 census just over 94% of the population is white), but a significant gay and lesbian population which gives the city a cosmopolitan reputation.



Recruitment to the project was via refugee and migrant networks in the city and organisations providing English for Speakers of Other Languages classes. The women were all self-selecting and involvement was voluntary with no restrictions, except that they had good levels of English language. We recruited 14 women from 10 different countries of origin: Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, India, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Palestine, Iraq, Iran and Egypt. Two of the women were Christian, 1 was Hindu and 11 were Muslim. All were aged between 24 and 45 and had lived in the UK for varying lengths of time, from 2 months to 20 years. The women either had refugee status themselves, or had come to the UK/EU through family formation as the wife of a refugee, or were waiting the outcome of an asylum application. Three had lived either in other Middle Eastern countries or another European country prior to arriving in the UK. Their backgrounds varied from urban to rural, from those who had relatively high levels of education, including two who had university qualifications, through to those who had had limited or no primary level education and very low or no literacy skills. All of the women had children and were married, although one woman had divorced her husband; several were engaged in part-time paid employment. The women selected their own pseudonyms which are used throughout.

A range of visual stimuli and activities were used to encourage reflection on British culture and everyday life, for example, a mapping exercise which involved each woman drawing a map of important places that their daily lives circulated around, what constituted the spatio-centrality of their lives and what was deemed to be more peripheral. Outside of the sessions participants were encouraged to become observers and documenters of their everyday cultural engagement. This was encouraged through the use of personal scrapbooks of collage, journal entries, drawing, life history writing and creative reflection. Each participant was given a digital camera and encouraged to record and reflect upon meaningful places, spaces and cultural activities using a photovoice methodology (Wang and Burris 1997; McIntyre 2003). This bricolage of work provided one of the frameworks for evaluating participants' evolving experience and understandings of Britishness and cultural values. Finally, semi-structured interviews were used at the beginning and end of the project to gather attitudinal evidence towards British cultural values. The data presented here are from focus groups and individual interviews, although understandings are grounded in insights gained across the 16 week programme.

The research deliberately avoided selecting participants from one religious or ethnic group to work with, not only to avoid the pitfalls of reifying particular faiths or cultures, but also because we were interested in understanding British culture from a broader refugee/migrant 'outsider within' perspective. This diasporic space '... troubles the notion of cultural origin, and of "roots", of primordial identities and authenticity. It unpicks the claims made for the unities of culturally homogeneous, racially purified national cultures and identities' (Hall 2012, 30). This does not inevitably entail a collapsing of different non-Western cultures and belief systems into a foundational or essentialist category of 'refugee/migrant', and indeed throughout the project we were constantly reminded that differences between women sharing, for example, the origin country or faith background can oftentimes be greater than differences between women from a different part of the globe who practice a different faith: the women had multiple affiliations and identifications, those based on faith, ethnicity or country of origin were not always the most significant. In the collection and analysis of data we were therefore looking for common themes in how British values were understood and enacted, while attending to



the multiple axes of identification which are relevant to migrant women. The range of backgrounds gave a richness and vibrancy to the programme, enabling points of identification, similarity and difference to be explored and contested through classroom discussions, focus groups and individual reflective activities and interviews. However, the shared experience of 'otherness', the sense of difference and marginality from dominant forms of Britishness provides the interpretive framework through which migrant women view the world, and enables points of identification and dis-identification which are particular to migrancy. Throughout this paper the broad distinction of migrant/non-migrant is used as simplifying device rather than the bureaucratic labelling imposed by immigration status; and to avoid the homogenising stasis implied by 'host community' or 'settled community'. At times 'Western' is used and this reflects the research participants' language.

### **Feminine citizenship and claims of moral virtue and distinctiveness**

Country/ies of origin and associated identity referents were of major significance when women talked about their identities and values; both concepts are relational and were often talked about in terms of 'back home' and 'here' (Werbner 2000; Espiritu 2003). There were often homogenising references to country of origin and imaginary shared characteristics of countries, or parts of the world, which were debated and challenged in focus groups. For example, differences between rural and urban living, and between different African or Middle Eastern countries were picked over and debated. Discussions of 'home' were complex and tinged with nostalgia (Espiritu 2003); inevitably they reflected an imagined and projected sense of life in the countries they had left. A key, shared, point of commonality was a sense of neighbourliness, family and community support associated with life 'back there', where friends and neighbours interacted and socialised on a daily basis, and took collective responsibility for the socialisation of children and care of family members. In contrast, British culture was generally thought of as being 'cold' and individualistic; a context in which it was difficult to establish relationships and build friendships with neighbours. In the following excerpt from one of the focus groups the participants had been embracing the greater gender freedoms and mobility associated with British values, these included, their right as women to study, work, go out alone, live alone and in one case, divorce her husband. This loosening of previous gender positioning and both the enabling and expectation of different gender performances supports earlier research with migrant women (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Morrice 2011; Munt 2012), and yet, as I will go on to argue, gender identities are simultaneously re-inscribed as women manage the contradictory expectations of western ideals of feminine citizenship, with pressures to conform to male dominated family systems and expectations.

- Interviewer LM: OK so what I wanted to ask you now is, are there things that you feel that you have less freedom, or things that are more difficult for you being here in Britain?
- Souso (Egypt): I am responsible as a single mum with a family alone here ...
- Interviewer LM: It's more difficult?
- Souso (Egypt): Yeah it is lots, so when you have family in your place, because you have just got to handle every single thing, no family, no mother, no relatives just like for emotional support. Relying on close friends.

- Mariam (Pakistan): This is very important, but here it is not. This is because our children growing up in this country, children have more freedom here than in our country.
- Linda (Sudan): Too much freedom actually.
- Mariam (Pakistan): And then important to the people is the grandparents, the uncle, aunty, they look after the children; they keep eyes all the time. And here just the parent, nobody here; and children when they grow up, if something wrong, you don't know about that. All the time something feeling like scared. Scared all the time.
- Interviewer LM: Worried about your children, because it's your responsibility as a parent and you haven't got your family ...
- Mariam (Pakistan): Yeah, to support you yeah.
- Interviewer LM: Do you see your neighbours here?
- Mixed responses from the group
- Safia (Iraq): Sometimes yes, but British people not like our people or Sudanese it is different.
- Miranda (Palestine): I have been in my house 3 years 5 months, after 2 years they start to say hello!
- Interviewer LM: It took two years to say hello to a neighbour?
- Lajita (India): In India, many people are cooking the food and when you finished work in the house, are coming outside, 'hello, how are you' ... you know and they share food together and they are sitting and having cup of tea.
- Linda (Sudan): If they saw your children doing bad things, can stop them or can just look up and say if you go anywhere, they can look after them and support you if you have a problem.
- Interviewer LM: Your neighbours as well as family, or just family?
- Linda (Sudan): Neighbours and family, sometimes neighbours are better than family because when you live together in the same area, very close to you. In my country in Sudan, sometimes, you live far away from your family, but your neighbour support you as your family. (Focus group; week 5)

This extract indicates a number of unwritten codes of conduct about how one should behave and which coalesce around two main themes: firstly, caring and concern for others, and secondly, symbolic and moral guardianship of family; the latter was articulated in relation to the socialisation of children. These themes were reiterated and amplified in individual interviews with participants and will be developed in this paper. The first of these themes was caring and concern for others: the women judged themselves and others on their concern for others and their ability to care (Gillingham 1982). It was the voluntary and collective labour of women which enabled cohesive, supportive communities and non-migrant women were seen as less willing to perform this caring, community and family work. This is expressed in Safia's quote:

I've been living here since I came, in the same building, and I know them [neighbours] by faces but we don't ... they don't put the effort ... nobody is putting the effort, it's not only you chat with your neighbour, they don't put the effort to welcome newcomers. (Safia, Iraq; interview 1)

It was not just in relation to a sense of caring and support in the community that non-migrant women were perceived as displaying a deficit of care and lack of worth, but also in relation to caring and maintenance of the family:

In my home country you don't take your mother to a nursing home. If she's old and she can't look after herself, the children are there to look after her until, you know, she goes. So that was quite something that I didn't really understand, that how could you abandon your mother and let other people look after her, and things like that? (Tanya, Zimbabwe; focus group week 12)

The commodification of care services, whether catering for young children or elderly relatives, has rapidly expanded (Kofman and Raghuram 2015), and women, at least those in the working and middle classes, have been expected and encouraged to engage with paid employment alongside caring for family members. The values of earning an income is an inscription of ideal feminine citizenship in the west, in which 'modern' women are expected to be self-reliant, independent and contributing financially, as well as through domestic and emotional labour, to the well-being of their families. The values, at least for middle class women, of autonomy, individual accomplishment and career are tropes of the modern, liberated women; they are taken for granted in the normalising discourses of feminine citizenship and are important sources of public respect and prestige. The participants explicitly rejected the strong individualism and personal sufficiency of the autonomous subject which they perceived as embodying British values. The form and content of their citizenship was different, and in contrast, a notion of feminine citizenship based on collectivist values, in which the virtue of strong family ties, caring and support of community members was enacted. Informal and gendered caring provision where family, friends and the wider community are the primary means of ensuring welfare were valued, and the need for formal, commodified provision of care services was perceived as filling a vacuum left by a society with a deficit of caring. For the women caring was a form of moral capital which represented a zone of moral difference and distinctiveness around which lines were drawn against real or imaginary non-migrant women, who in Safia's words did not 'make the effort'.

In depicting caring as a moral duty of citizenship the women were exposing the inadequacies of universalist, undifferentiated models of citizenship which fail to recognise or value women's contribution to social reproduction (e.g. Lister 1997; Yuval Davis 1997; Arnot 2009; Morrice 2016). Gendered and ethnocentric structures of valorisation give little recognition or social value to caring which is generally misrecognised. In the case of migrant women the prioritising of these practices easily feeds into stereotyped and stigmatised constructions of migrant women as lacking ambition, oppressed and failing to integrate, or conform to western ideals of gender equality.

### **Feminine respectability and women as symbolic and moral guardians**

As suggested, women are not only biological reproducers but are the '... "cultural carriers" who have a key role in passing on the language and cultural symbols to the young' (Castles and Davidson 2000, 121). The socialisation of children is a central feature of cultural reproduction. Erel (2013) frames migrant mothering as enacting citizenship and points to the way that caring and cultural subjectivities are conflictual, engaging contestations around ethnicity, religiosity, gender and generation. As 'cultural workers' (Kershaw 2005 cited in Erel 2013, 971) migrant mothers' work is to instil a sense of self-worth, cultural continuity and history in their children, while also negotiating multiple identifications, including national sentiments and belongings, religious, local and diasporic.

Most of the women had become mothers in the UK (only one had arrived with a small child), and the subject positions of wife and mother were central to the women's descriptions and classification of self. In our discussions and interviews the women frequently expressed their discomfort at Western sexual values which permit open displays of sexuality, and in particular gay or lesbian sexuality. Implicit in their discourses of feminine value was (compulsory) heterosexuality and sex only within marriage; this was presented as the only acceptable or correct form of sexuality in their families and communities. Respectable femininity entailed self-regulation of sexual relations and sexual conduct, requiring the construction of what Skeggs has termed a 'disembodied sexuality' in which bodies are perceived as separated and in need of control, or even cover (Skeggs 1997, 123). Despite finding Western sexual values deeply troubling the women showed generosity of spirit as they made efforts to bridge the gulf and accommodate these differences (see Munt 2016).

The women perceived the hypersexualised portrayals in the media of young people and women, alcohol consumption, smoking and sexual license as prevailing social norms, generally accepted in British culture. These values and ways of being existed in tension with the values of modesty, purity and abstinence reflected in the discursive formations of family and faith. The symbolic use of women's bodies, sexuality and a consumer lifestyle is a powerful and normalising discourse of neo-liberal societies, and so entrenched in notions of individual liberty and sexual freedoms, that the women's resistance to these ideals could only find expression in the idea that children growing up had 'too much freedom'. The language, resources and authority required to articulate dissent from these portrayals in any other way was not available; instead the women's discomfort is expressed in a way which positions them as subjugated and as denying the feelings, freedom and agency not only of themselves, but also their daughters.

There was considerable fear and anxiety about how to protect their children from such influences and to ensure that, particularly their daughters, accrued capital in the form of modesty and purity. The pressure was exacerbated in the context of what was perceived to be shifting lines of power between generations, and without the collective support of the wider community imagined in the countries they had grown up in.

In our countries you don't have to explain these things because they learn it from their friends. Families pass their good values to their children and they learn from each other; so the whole community is raising your child. You don't have to explain about sex, about drinking about anything. Here you are taking 100% responsibility for everything your child believes. So we are worried and more stressed. (Safia, Iraq; focus group week 8)

At the same time it was a realm in which the women distinguished themselves from less virtuous non-migrant women who, in their view, did not instil appropriate moral values and behaviours in their children, and did not always provide good role models.

There's a lot of smoking here. Especially for ladies ... And the other strange thing is, that they also tend to smoke when they've got their children around them. And I am just thinking, why are they doing that? (Tanya, Zimbabwe; interview 1)

The weight of responsibility for the moral socialisation and surveillance of children was acute and represents an intensification and re-inscription of their role as symbolic bearers of culture. The honour of the whole family depends on the purity of daughters

and the well-made marriage. With the moral status of the family resting on women's labour, the consequences of failure are immense and the transgression of daughters can strip women of their identity and place in the family. In the quote below Mariam describes what happened when her 17-year-old daughter became pregnant:

She's pregnant. She's pregnant and she's staying home and she's crying, and I said, 'Whose fault? Your fault, but you know, your family's going to be blaming me – mum has not controlled the girl'. And that's true; that is true ... And after that my husband – I didn't tell my husband, because I'm scared. Already the people blaming me, and then after this happened, then they more blaming me! ... And you know my husband is very, very shame, and the social workers are coming. I'm in the kitchen, I'm very, very scared ... and I saw my husband's face. He's very angry with me. 'You Mum, and you don't know what she's doing? And why you doing like this? You shame for me, everyone, for my family.' (Mariam, Pakistan; interview 1)

In the quote Mariam recognises that it is the daughter who has transgressed, but that as the mother she is the one held responsible and who shoulders the disapproval and shame of family and community. Skeggs suggests '[s]hame involves a recognition of the judgements of others and awareness of social norms: one measures oneself against the standards established by others' (Skeggs 1997, 123). Failure to constrain the sexuality of her daughter is a source of classification and judgement for Mariam and she is found lacking; she has failed to impart the right cultural capital to her daughter and consequently she is denied the ability to construct herself as respectable. To contain and limit the threat of contagion the family exercise moral censure, and Mariam goes on to describe how she and her daughter are disowned by her husband's family: no longer receiving visits or invited to their home, thus enabling the moral virtue and respectability of the extended family group to be maintained.

Women's labour and investment in their family are a means of describing and classifying themselves; as forms of cultural capital modesty and purity are key to cultural reproduction and in local, community and familial spheres this capital is validated and recognised. The women claimed moral distinction in relation to the perceived less moral behaviour of western women and in so doing their marginality and inferior positioning is reframed and moral worth can be claimed. Yet, as Espiritu (2003) points out, this reframing of marginality is achieved through controlling women, and hinges on the performance of gender subordination and heterosexuality. The worth and moral value of the community is dependent on the purity and therefore moral value of women and their daughters.

### Moral evaluations in everyday life and making worth visible

The issue of immigration to the UK was the defining argument in the recent campaign for the UK to leave the European Union. Representations of migrants in popular and media discourses overwhelmingly focus on numbers, and depict the UK as 'full up' and 'too crowded'. Migrants and their families are positioned as putting a strain on resources, or being attracted to the UK by overly generous welfare benefits, or in the case of Muslims being a potential terrorist threat. It is not surprising that these negative evaluation become translated into everyday prejudices such that racial discrimination was felt and lived on a daily basis; Islamophobia and racism towards Muslims in particular is increasing at a fairly dramatic rate (Ameli and Merali 2015).

Signifiers of difference such as skin colour, clothing and language drew evaluative stares, comments, verbal abuse, and in some instances physically threatening behaviour. Racist comments and gestures were often made covertly, usually when the women were on their own or with their children, and occurred in such a way that the women were often left not sure whether it was racism or general rudeness. Incidents were particularly prevalent on or waiting for buses, including comments such as: 'What are you looking at?', 'Go back to your bloody country!', swearing and inaudible mutterings, to one incident of a woman waiting at a bus stop and being subjected to a fake drive-by-shooting. Sometimes it was hostile stares, or rudeness such as bus drivers ignoring their greetings or thanks on a bus while acknowledging other passengers'. Increasingly comments were reflecting dominant public discourses about migrants not speaking English and being dependent on welfare benefits. For example, when speaking together in their own language women were subjected to seemingly polite requests such as 'Stop, please speak English' to 'That is very rude, you have to speak English, you are in the UK!' It was also commonplace for women to receive hissed comments such as 'You are coming for money' and 'Benefits!'

In the focus groups some of the women tried to brush off comments as 'perhaps a joke', or 'maybe I didn't hear it properly', 'maybe they are just rude', but their affect was real; the comments were experienced as hurtful, humiliating, frightening and confusing. As one woman said 'I don't say anything, but I am crying inside' (Mariam). Particularly painful experiences involved racism towards their children: examples were given of children being bullied at school and neighbours not allowing their children to play together. One woman spoke of her neighbour saying 'she hates me and my daughter because I am wearing the hijab and is a different colour' (Journey). These experiences point to the quotidian moral evaluations the women were subject to and how their social positioning as problematic 'other', as 'oppressed', 'benefit scroungers' made it difficult to claim positive evaluations. The selecting of cultural markers such as language and modes of dress, and assumed welfare dependency as the basis for discrimination suggests not only how non-Western dress and non-European languages fail to accrue social value and worth in public spaces, but also how new forms of evaluation and discrimination are emerging. Subaltern cultural identities and value difference are not only increasingly perceived as a cause of social problems, but have also become a source of migrant women's own marginalisation and backwardness, a blaming of women for their failure to integrate.

Clothing and modest dress was an important means by which the women actively made visible their difference and asserted a moral boundary between valuable modest identities and immodest and immoral behaviour symbolised in the wearing of revealing clothes. Islamic dress codes have been the subject of intense public debate in the UK in recent years and is generally identified by the British media as a symbol of women's oppression, and somehow indicative of Muslim separatism, or at least incompatible with British identity and values (Uberoi et al. 2011). The making visible of different cultural values creates discomfort and in many ways epitomises the zeitgeist of the moment – fear and distrust of Muslims. The hijab (scarf covering the head and chest) invokes a lesser degree of disquiet, but is still subject to negative valuation and linked to a perceived block to modernity and women's liberty. Alibhai-Brown, for example, writes that '[t]he hijab, jilbab, burqa and niqab are visible signs of this retreat from progressive values', and 'a symbol of oppression and subservience' (Alibhai-Brown 2015). Muslim women in these discourses are



positioned as either dangerous or oppressed (Mirza 2013); or as rejecting core British values and challenging the values of individual liberty (Ahmed 2007).

Of the eleven Muslim women in the project, seven wore a hijab in public spaces, three did not and one occasionally did. There was considerable curiosity and interest among all of the women about their different motivations, thoughts and feelings around the adoption of particular styles of dress. The discussion ranged from the practical advantages of the hijab – ‘bad hair days’ and less time spent getting ready to leave the house, through to the importance of a visible symbol of faith and respectability. It was also a reflection of a particular stage in life (Hopkins 2010) and the assertion of a moral identity and social responsibility in relation to children. As one participant commented:

I want to be a good role model for my daughter, I want her to be a good Muslim, because now she is a teenager. Before I wore a scarf, but it was very loose; now I have started to wear it tighter. (Joury, Sudan; focus group week 8)

Here the adjustment of dress becomes an intentional act invoked for specific outcomes: in this case the desire to set a moral standard and example to children. Dress, which had been a relatively unreflected aspect of everyday life when the women were younger, and prior to becoming a minority in the UK, now conveyed a moral quality and became an explicit and conscious value and marker of separateness.

[We mix] mainly with other Arab countries – they have the same religion, there is similarity between cultures, the clothes they wear. It makes it easier to get involved. Religion and appearance is important, that is how we know we share values. (Linda, Sudan; focus group week 8)

A collective Muslim identity is asserted in the quote above, despite the internal differences and divisions that the women just a few moments earlier had been discussing. The speaker here is articulating the strategic way that migrant Muslim women operationalise dress to make themselves visible and to denote distinctiveness. Although signified most clearly by the headscarf, modest dress was claimed to be important by all of the women. As Skeggs’s (1997) has suggested, clothing enables women to display their difference and demonstrate inner character. Clothing is used to symbolise moral virtue and by dressing in a modest way they could construct and enhance a collective identity and an imaginary space of belonging and community. A strategy to display a sign of value and fashion themselves as morally distinct from real or imaginary immodest and immoral women who did not share the same values.

For Muslim women, the wearing of covering clothes was agreed to be a personal choice informed by the logics of modesty and faith. In the short exchange between three Muslim women below they draw on the liberal discourses and values of individual freedom, tolerance and respect to express their anger at the double standards in the way Muslim women are perceived and represented in the media. Interestingly, this is the very language of the moral discourses used to shame and deny value to Muslim dress codes and implicitly Muslim women, and by drawing on this language they expose the contestability and flexibility of British values. The exchange immediately followed a discussion of gay pride celebrations and the annual World Naked Bike Ride, a clothing-optional bike ride through the City in protest at carbon dependency.<sup>2</sup> The removal of clothes was recognised



cross-culturally as a form of protest, but nearly all of the women reported staying at home with their families and avoiding the city centre during these events.

- Sirin: So this one, the one who is the Muslim it is called niqab, she has freedom yeah; you don't have to do it.
- Safia: Yeah, and the Muslims here are seeing so many gays, Christians, and we are showing tolerance and respect to their freedom, and we don't say anything or even a word to bother anybody, though we think that it is very much teasing, because we are raised to a different culture, but at the same time, we are showing respect... If she's covered that's up to her; if she doesn't hurt anybody with being covered. If that will harm somebody OK that is to be discussed, but if there is no harm, then why? Linda: Stop talking about if it is this Muslim or hijab or all these things, what is very bad to your eyes? Seeing people who aren't wearing anything, or seeing this wearing lots of clothes?
- Sirin: Be honest.
- Linda: This is respect! (Focus group week 8)

The exchange indicates an assertive and active resisting of negative valuation of Muslim women and there a strong sense of injustice not only at the discursive positioning of Muslim women as oppressed by a culture and religion which denies freedom or choice, but also at the failure to grant reciprocal recognition to women wearing coverings as subjects of equal value. Bourdieu (1990) reminds us that what is (mis)recognised as legitimate not only has little to do with the natural order of things and more to do with legitimising arbitrary social hierarchies. The three participants here are challenging the social values which recognise the rights and freedoms of some collectives, but judge a Muslim women's right to dress as she pleases as problematic; in doing so they are challenging the arbitrary and institutionalised hierarchy of cultural value.

### Concluding comments

The discussions here have presented different expressions and understandings of what it means to be human and a citizen, what is important and what is of value in life. The increasingly muscular attempts to construct and pin-down Britishness and British cultural values reflects the state's project of moral regulation and control. In these constructions of Britishness white, English, middle class culture is the most prominent, as exemplified in the British citizenship test (Morrice 2016), and represents the valued ways of being and identity with which migrants are expected to align. The state expresses abhorrence at racism as morally repugnant and yet, through techniques of moral judgement and control it creates new structures and categories of inequality based on value difference. The universalising and normalisation of certain cultural identities and values gives rise to new axes of differentiation, allowing new matrices of power and belonging to emerge. In these polarising discourses migrant women are positioned as being in deficit: lacking English language, lacking sexual freedoms, backwards, confined to a domestic sphere, bearing multiple children and welfare dependent, lacking the necessary dispositions and unable or unwilling to engage in the self-making and individual accomplishment required of western feminine citizenry. The performance of moral worth exemplified in the dominant discourses is denied, and they are positioned as being of little value and having little to contribute to a modern and progressive state.

Much of the discussions around British values and identities can be read as symbolic struggles over definitions of what is 'good' and what constitutes valued ways of being; in the cultural hierarchies produced, 'migrant moralities' are confirmed and confined to the lowest strata, lacking merit or worth.

The interpretations, strategies and enactment of citizenship by the women in this project unsettle the norms and forms of these dominant constructions. The idea of caring, familial and collective responsibilities can be seen as an interpretive trope, enabling the construction of gender identities distinct from stereotypes of 'problematic', 'oppressed' and 'passive' migrant women, and from conceptions of the idealised western feminine citizen in neoliberalism. It is a trope which enables the carving out of a valued identity and is used as a strategy of resistance. In the process of claiming moral worth, the women presented British cultural values as morally flawed and lacking. However, the capital and signs of social value legitimated within migrants communities are features of a lifestyle deemed 'unworthy' and denoting 'failure' in dominant discourses and other spatial contexts. Cultural capital in the form of modesty, purity and caring is recognised and conveys symbolic value (Bourdieu 1998) within the local context, but such cultural resources do not enable women to accrue value to themselves in other contexts. Like the working class women in Skegg's work:

... all they can display is 'lack'; lack of access to the techniques for telling themselves and lack of access to the right culture; they cannot perform the good self because they do not have the cultural resources to do so. (2005, 974)

Migrant women live their lives in and through a plurality of domains and arenas of power and material forces, many with conflicting gender ideologies. Cultural heritage has an inevitable bearing on gender and how in the context of contemporary Britain notions of gender become contested, defended and reworked. This study suggests that identities are, partially at least, constructed on conceptualisations of non-migrant/western women as immodest, less willing to abide by the heteronormativity of husband and wife relations, more selfish and lacking the strong family and collective values required to perform the social and emotional labour of caring and cultural maintenance. However, this moral superiority is achieved through an underscoring and re-inscription of gender identities in which women's dedication to family, culture and community, and their heterosexuality and sexual restraint become technologies for regulating and controlling women.

Finally, this research has shown how arbitrary hierarchies of social value and worth are contested by migrant women, and has exposed some of the conceptual slipperiness of terminology used to describe British values. Cultural values can be experienced as powerful imperatives to uphold and yet at the same time can exist in tension and perhaps even in contradiction with other belief systems making them open to change, reinterpretation and revaluation. The multiple identifications and belongings of the women in this project enabled a highly sophisticated understanding of self and the world around them; in the process of self-making the identities and values drawn upon cannot be presumed fixed, essential categories, but rather as constantly in the process of being re/formulated in response to everyday experiences, and the power relations embedded in discourses operating in multiple and intersecting levels and domains.

## Notes

1. Sally Munt was the Principal Investigator and I was the Co-Investigator on this AHRC funded project. For further information please see: <http://www.lifeintheukproject.co.uk>
2. The women's response to the Naked Bike Ride and Pride is explored in Munt (2016).

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